



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region



Environmental Assessment and Forest Plan Amendment for Managing Special Species Habitat

Santa Fe National Forest



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Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need

Proposed Action

The Santa Fe National Forest (Forest) is proposing a non-significant amendment to the Santa Fe National Forest Plan, originally approved in July of 1987. The proposed amendment updates selected standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan regarding plant and animal species on the federal threatened and endangered (T&E) species list, Forest Service sensitive species list for the Southwestern Region (Region-3), as well as a few species of limited abundance on the Forest that were listed as sensitive when the Forest Plan was approved in 1987. These species are collectively referred to in this document as “special status species”. The Forest Supervisor is the official who will decide whether or not to approve the proposed amendment.

The amendment described in this Environmental Assessment (EA) is considered non-significant and inconsequential, as it merely updates and clarifies language in the Forest Plan to reflect current management policies, practices and species lists that have changed since the Plan was authorized in 1987. It would not change management policies or practices. The amendment is described in detail in Table 1. It essentially:

- Eliminates or rephrases outdated standards and guidelines for special status species, replacing them with language that is consistent with current habitat management requirements.
- Consolidates standards and guidelines for special status species into the same part of the Forest Plan, rather than leaving them scattered throughout the Plan.
- Incorporates by reference the detailed and prescriptive habitat management direction for specific special status species as contained in Forest Service directives, interagency recovery plans (for federally listed species) and conservation plans (for sensitive species).

Forest Plan standards and guidelines provide broad programmatic management direction that forms a strategic framework for planning, implementation and monitoring of site-specific project-level actions. The proposed amendment does not involve any project-level or habitat-disturbing activities, and therefore would not alter existing habitat conditions in any manner.

The amendment was determined to be “non-significant”, consistent with 36 CFR 219.10(f) and Forest Service Manual 1922.51 and 1909.12.5.32. The amendment would not change existing land and resource management practices, prescriptions, conditions, or Forest Plan goals, objectives, or outputs. Furthermore, the scope of this amendment is limited to selected standards and guidelines regarding special status species, and does not address all habitat management standards and guidelines. For example, it does not address standards and guidelines for Mexican spotted owl (threatened) or northern goshawk (sensitive), since those were updated in a 1996 Region-wide amendment. It also does not involve updating standards and guidelines for other wildlife or plant species, or monitoring requirements contained in Chapter 5 of the Forest Plan. More comprehensive Forest Plan updates to other standards/guidelines and the monitoring chapter will be addressed in future amendments or during Forest Plan revision, scheduled to begin in 2007.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for the amendment is to have Forest Plan standards and guidelines for managing special status species that:

- Accurately reflect current species lists and agency policies that changed since the Plan was approved;
- Reflect agency policies that apply to groups of T&E or sensitive species rather than to individual species;
- Endure over a long period of time and not need to be amended every time a change is made to T&E and sensitive species lists;
- Incorporate management direction from interagency agreements/plans for Jemez Mountains salamander, Arizona willow and Rio Grande cutthroat trout.
- Are consolidated in one part of the Forest Plan where it they are easy to find and use, to help ensure that agency personnel can efficiently plan and implement projects in accordance with the latest direction.

The purpose and need is based on changes that have occurred since the Forest Plan was published in 1987, such as the following:

- Southwestern willow flycatcher was added to the T&E species list in 1995, and regional direction was issued for managing its habitat.
- Peregrine falcon was removed from the T&E species list in 1999, and added to the Forest Service Region-3 sensitive species list.
- Several wildlife and plant species discussed in the Forest Plan were listed as sensitive when the Plan was approved, and were later removed from that list. Other species have also been added to that list since 1987¹.
- Interagency conservation plans were completed for sensitive species such as Jemez Mountains salamander (2000), Arizona willow (1995), and Rio Grande cutthroat trout (2003).

Other than the 1996 amendment that added new standards and guidelines for managing Mexican spotted owl (threatened) and northern goshawk (sensitive) habitats, the Forest Plan has not been updated with respect to managing other special status species.

There are other outdated standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan that will be addressed either in subsequent amendments or during Forest Plan revision. It seemed important to move forward with this particular amendment now due to the number of changes that have occurred to special status species lists and management policies, which are utilized in planning and implementing

¹ Current sensitive species list can be found at www.fs.fed.us/r3/sfe

nearly every Forest project. The Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and other agencies need Forest Plan direction that is consistent with current regulations and policies as we work together in cooperatively managing special status species and their habitats.

Public Participation and Issues

In preparing this amendment, the Forest Service informed and involved agencies, organizations and individuals who may be interested in or affected by this amendment. The proposed amendment was included on the Forest's published *Schedule of Proposed Actions*, distributed by mail and posted on the Internet. In addition, on October 4, 2002, letters asking for comment on the proposed amendment were mailed to approximately 151 parties including municipal, state and federal agencies (including New Mexico Game and Fish, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service), Native American tribes, Audubon Society, Partners in Flight and other organizations and interested parties. Approximately five comment letters were received, followed by some e-mail messages and phone calls. Comments were carefully reviewed and considered. As a result of comments received, minor changes were made to the wording of the amendment, primarily for clarification and to ensure that the intent of the management direction and level of protection offered in the original standards/guidelines was not lost in the amended language. In addition, a meeting was held with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish on October 17, 2003 to address their comments and work collaboratively on clarifying the proposed language in the amendment.

Based on an evaluation of comments received, the Forest determined that there were no significant issues raised that were relevant to the proposed amendment and its possible consequences. However, some public concerns were expressed about whether the amendment might reduce the level of protection offered to certain species or their habitats. The Environmental Consequences Chapter of this document addresses those concerns, and explains how and why the amendment would not result in a loss of habitat protection or alter the manner in which the Forest Service currently manages habitat for these species.

Chapter 2 – Alternatives

No alternatives to the proposed action were necessary for this EA as there were no significant issues identified. The Forest Service evaluated the Proposed Amendment (Alternative A) along with the No Action Alternative (Alternative B).

Alternative A: Proposed Amendment.

Under this alternative, the Forest Plan would be amended to meet the previously described purpose and need. This proposed amendment is fully described in Table 1. Table 1 shows the current Forest Plan management direction (standards and guidelines) along with the proposed management direction and rationale for the proposed change. The management direction in the table is organized into the following five parts:

- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Monitoring T&E and Sensitive Species Habitat
- Peregrine Falcon Habitat
- Sensitive Species
- Jemez Mountains Salamander Habitat

Alternative B: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the current management direction for special status species would remain in effect and the proposed amendment would not be incorporated into the Forest Plan.



Table 1: Current and Proposed Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines

Current Forest Plan Location	Current Standard & Guideline (to be replaced by proposal)	Proposed Standard & Guideline	Rationale for Change
Threatened & Endangered Species Habitat			
Page 51 Para. 2 & Page 107 Para. 2 (Mgmt. Area C) & Page 90 Para. 7	When developed recreation facilities are proposed in threatened and endangered species (T&E) habitat, a biological assessment will be obtained and a no adverse effect determination made before project authorization. Existing facilities located in T&E habitat will be managed to protect that habitat. All development projects will receive a biological evaluation. Avoid development of new roads within essential bald eagle and peregrine falcon habitat, which would increase public access and use. Restrict public access and use on existing roads as necessary to protect these habitats.	When proposed projects may affect threatened and endangered (T&E) species habitats, complete a Biological Assessment, consult with US Fish and Wildlife Service, and follow other procedural requirements in FSM 2670. Adhere to Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulations, species recovery plans, and species-specific regional directives and memos. Identify actions that are likely to adversely effect listed species and avoid or mitigate those effects whenever possible.	Reflects change in policy and terminology. “No adverse effect” is no longer used, and is not mandatory before project approval. Also, the Forest Service (Region-3) currently uses “biological assessment” for evaluating effects to federally listed species and “biological evaluation” for evaluating effects to sensitive species. Peregrine falcon was removed from the T&E species list and should no longer be combined with direction for managing bald eagle or other T&E species. Provides adequate protection to bald eagle habitat while broadening the direction to apply to all T&E species and habitat-disturbing activities.
Page 65 Para. 3	Review all planned or permitted programs and activities to develop biological evaluations and determine needs for consultation or conference with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Consultation will be	(deleted)	Deleted because Page 65 Para 3 is redundant with other standards and guidelines in the proposed amendment.

Current Forest Plan Location	Current Standard & Guideline (to be replaced by proposal)	Proposed Standard & Guideline	Rationale for Change
	initiated for situations where listed or proposed listed species may be affected. This process will be completed prior to project approval.		
Page 64 Para. 1	Proposed activities which may disturb the integrity of prairie dog towns must be fully evaluated and managed to perpetuate the species. Consideration will be given for their potential contribution to black-footed ferret recovery efforts.	(deleted)	Deleting this reflects the fact that although black-footed ferret is listed as endangered, it is extirpated from New Mexico (they do not occur on the Forest). There is no current recovery effort on the Forest, and it is highly unlikely that such an effort would occur due to the lack of sufficient prey base (prairie dog) grassland habitat.
Monitoring Special Status Species Habitat			
Page 63 Para. 9 , & Page 65 Para. 2	Monitor management practices within occupied and potential threatened or endangered species habitat and evaluate impacts. Monitor management practices within occupied and potential habitat for plants listed as threatened, endangered, or on the Southwestern Region sensitive list.	Monitor management practices within occupied and potential habitat for threatened, endangered and sensitive species, and evaluate impacts.	Combines similar direction from pages 63 & 65 to eliminate redundancy.
Peregrine Falcon Habitat			
Page 63 Para. 5	Activities likely to cause disturbance, including public use will be prohibited in the vicinity of essential peregrine falcon nesting habitat between March 1 st and August 15 th , unless a biological assessment and determination of “no effect” has been made. Should peregrines remain attached to nest sites after August	Develop a site plan for each peregrine falcon eyrie (designated suitable nest site). Follow the specific requirements described in the site plans for each eyrie and the surrounding habitat zones, including requirements for evaluating	Reflects de-listing of peregrine falcon (no BA required), and Reflects agency policies, including Regional Forester’s Memo (2670, 9/16/99) for managing peregrine habitat during the 5-year period

Current Forest Plan Location	Current Standard & Guideline (to be replaced by proposal)	Proposed Standard & Guideline	Rationale for Change
	15 th , this period may be extended; or should young peregrine disperse earlier than August 15 th , this period may be shortened. Seasonal restrictions will apply to all nesting habitat unless the biological assessment determines that the proposed activity will have no effect after May 21 st . Such activities may include but are not limited to: recreational activities or vehicular traffic within 1 mile, or other motorized equipment within two miles. In addition, land-use practices or development which significantly alters the character of essential peregrine falcon hunting habitat or prey base (generally within four miles of nest site) will be prohibited. All activities proposed within four miles of potential or existing nesting habitat will be evaluated for potential effects.	potential impacts, monitoring, restricting the timing of activities, and controlling activities that may cause disturbance or pose a threat to the eyrie.	following delisting. Reflects changes in terminology and eliminates redundancy with other standards. Also, it is not feasible to prohibit all activities that may disturb peregrine eyries. Restrictions on activities near eyries are detailed in eyrie site plans. Protections for peregrine falcon is also addressed by direction for sensitive species, in the next section.
Page 62 Para. 3 & 7, & Page 153 Para. 6	Develop site plans for the peregrine falcon. Continue to identify existing and potential habitat for peregrine falcons. Complete inventories and habitat management plans for breeding habitats. Monitor management practices within designated peregrine falcon habitat and evaluate impacts. Inventory and evaluate the habitat to develop eyrie management plans for birds of prey.	When a peregrine falcon site plan doesn't already exist and a biological evaluation finds that a proposed action may negatively impact an occupied eyrie, develop a site plan for the eyrie before approving the project.	Reflects completion of inventories and identification of existing and potential habitat. Monitoring requirements for sensitive species are in Chapter 5 of the Forest Plan and do not need to be repeated in this section.
Page 63 Para 6	Manage firewood to eliminate gathering activities within 1 mile of essential peregrine falcon nesting habitat during occupied periods.	(none)	Site plans address management of firewood gathering and other disturbance activities.
Sensitive Species			
Page 63 Para. 1	Consider culturing, stocking, protective fencing and other appropriate methods to enhance plant species	Utilize methods designed to protect and enhance sensitive species populations on	Maintains original intent, ie. to consider/utilize methods to

Current Forest Plan Location	Current Standard & Guideline (to be replaced by proposal)	Proposed Standard & Guideline	Rationale for Change
& Page 122 Para. 5 (Mgmt. Area G) & Page 144 Para. 5 and 6 (Mgmt. Area K)	such as grama grass cactus and the wood lily with the goal of eliminating the need for formal listing as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Protect known populations of grama grass cactus and manage to increase and recover the population. Manage grazed lands to provide suitable habitat for re-introduction of grama grass cactus. Determine the rate of rodent-induced mortality and take appropriate action in nursery plots for grama grass cactus. Wildlife management in the Erosion Pasture will feature the following: Grama grass cactus and the attainment of stable, well-distributed populations; development of a grama grass cactus recovery action plan.	the Forest with the goal of eliminating the need for formal listing as threatened or endangered by US Fish and Wildlife Service. Evaluate impacts of proposed actions on sensitive species or their habitats according to the procedures described in FSM 2672.4, and document results in a Biological Evaluation. Coordinate with state and federal agencies in identifying potential impacts to sensitive species and their habitats, and ways to avoid or mitigate negative impacts where possible. Emphasize conservation of plant or animal species having limited abundance and distribution on the Forest, such as grama grass cactus in grasslands and woodlands, and wood lily in mid-elevation mixed conifer forests.	enhance sensitive plant species. Restates the “goal of eliminating the need for formal listing...” and applies it to all sensitive species. Reflects changes to Regional Forester’s sensitive species list- grama grass cactus, wood lily, spotted bat are no longer listed. Applies direction to all sensitive species since the list periodically changes, and updates language to reflect current agency direction on evaluating effects and coordinating with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Adds a “conservation emphasis” for grama grass cactus, wood lily and other species of limited abundance & distribution, rather than just deleting all direction for species no longer listed as sensitive in Region-3.
Page 61 Para. 9	In cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, jointly review the status and action needs for the spotted bat and meadow jumping mouse.	(deleted)	(see previous rationale)
Jemez Mountains Salamander			
Page 62 Para. 1 &	Cooperate with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the USFWS, and other agencies to develop a Master Interagency Agreement for the Jemez	Adhere to applicable interagency conservation plans and agreements for sensitive species. Current examples	Reflects completion of the Master Interagency Agreement, inventory and evaluation of habitat, and

Current Forest Plan Location	Current Standard & Guideline (to be replaced by proposal)	Proposed Standard & Guideline	Rationale for Change
<p>Page 153 Para. 5 (Mgmt. Area N) & Page 63 Para. 7 & Page 153 Para. 10 (Mgmt. Area N)</p>	<p>Mountains salamander. Inventory and evaluate the habitat to develop action plans which maximize the area's contribution to Jemez Mountains salamander recovery efforts. Permitted firewood collection will not be allowed in occupied Jemez Mountains salamander habitat unless a biological evaluation determines the action to be beneficial. Permitted firewood collection will be conducted in a manner consistent with Jemez Mountains salamander objectives.</p>	<p>include: Jemez Mountains Cooperative Management Plan, Arizona Willow Conservation Agreement, and Conservation Agreement for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. This includes following protocols developed for inventory and monitoring, evaluating impacts, and consulting with the assigned interagency team when proposed activities may impact these species or their habitats. Work cooperatively with the interagency teams to avoid or mitigate negative impacts where possible. This direction applies to future interagency agreements or conservation plans that may be developed for specific species.</p>	<p>development of the management plan, for Jemez Mountains salamander. Incorporates direction contained in the cooperative management plan for Jemez Mountains salamander, as well as the interagency plans/agreements for other sensitive species. Applies this new direction to future interagency agreements/plans. Protecting salamanders from negative impacts, including those from firewood collection, is covered by incorporation of the cooperative management plan, as well as by proposed standards and guidelines that avoid or mitigate negative impacts where possible.</p>

Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative A, the proposed amendment, would not result in any environmental impacts, changes to existing resource conditions, or changes to current management practices for two key reasons: (1) the amendment is programmatic (strategic) and does not involve site-specific or ground-disturbing activities, and (2) the amendment replaces outdated Forest Plan standards and guidelines to reflect current species status lists, management practices and policies, and would not change how special status species or their habitats are currently managed. Thus, under both alternatives, the Forest would continue to evaluate potential effects of proposed actions on special status species and their habitats, coordinate with other agencies, apply measures to avoid or mitigate potential adverse impacts wherever possible, and conduct monitoring & evaluation for special status species and their habitats, consistent with existing requirements.

The changes associated with Alternative A would improve Forest Plan consistency with current species status lists and agency regulations, policies, and practices. It would become clear that the direction for managing T&E or sensitive species habitat applies to all T&E or sensitive species, not just a select few. Furthermore, by eliminating redundancy and consolidating Forest Plan direction for managing special status species habitats into one section, the Forest Plan would be more concise and easy to use when planning and implementing projects that may affect special status species or their habitats.

Table 2: Comparison of Effects – Alternatives A & B

Purpose & Need for Action The Forest Plan...:	Alternative A	Alternative B
Reflects current species lists and agency policies that changed since the Plan was approved	Yes	No
Reflects requirements that apply to groups of T&E or sensitive species rather than to individual species	Yes	No
Contains direction that will endure and not need to be amended every time a change is made to species lists	Yes	No
Incorporates interagency agreements/plans for managing habitat for sensitive species such as Jemez Mountains salamander, Arizona willow and Rio Grande cutthroat trout	Yes	No
Consolidates direction on managing special status species into one section where it is easy to find and use, and eliminates redundant direction	Yes	No

Chapter 3 - Environmental Consequences

This section describes the environmental consequences or effects of the proposed changes to Forest Plan standards and guidelines for special status species, as described in Table 1.

Effects of Alternative A - Proposed Amendment

Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat

The proposed changes offer adequate protection to T&E species, consistent with current laws, regulations and agency policies. Although the proposed amendment does not contain the original wording that begins with “Avoid development of new roads within essential bald eagle and peregrine falcon habitat ... and restrict public access and use on existing roads...” the revised wording adequately protects those habitats. The amendment requires that potential adverse effects be identified and avoided or mitigated wherever possible, along with requiring adherence to direction in recovery plans and ESA regulations intended to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts. Thus, the amendment includes avoiding or mitigating development of new roads and/or restricting public access and use of roads where possible if adverse impacts may occur to listed species or their habitats. Although the amended language for T&E species would no longer apply to peregrine falcon, similar standards are included in the proposed amendment for sensitive species, which applies to peregrine falcon (see Table 1 sections on Peregrine Falcon and Sensitive Species). Thus, this amended direction adequately covers consideration of potentially adverse effects such as from road building or road use activities, and applies to bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and other special status species. The additional amended direction specific to peregrine falcon provides further habitat protection direction by requiring adherence to nesting area (eyrie) site plans that contain site-specific restrictions on land use activities that may disturb or threaten the nest site.

Thus, the amendment includes the original intent for managing T&E species habitats and expands upon it by broadening the language and applying it to all activities that could potentially impact bald eagle as well as to other T&E species. In addition, the changes in Alternative A would help ensure that the Forest Plan provides a strategic framework that will endure over time, and would not need to be amended every time there is a change to species lists, recovery plans or directives.

The amendment continues to require Biological Assessments and consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service when projects may affect T&E species or their habitats, consistent with Endangered Species Act regulations. Replacing the term “Biological Evaluation” with “Biological Assessment” further improves consistency with current Forest Service Region-3 policies for evaluating effects on federally listed T&E species.

The amendment also adds to T&E species direction by incorporating the comprehensive management requirements contained in Endangered Species Act regulations, species recovery plans and species-specific regional directives and memos. This would improve the Forest Plan by outlining all applicable requirements for managing T&E species habitats in one place, which would make it more efficient to use when planning and implementing projects.

By using language that reflects the change in status for peregrine falcon from a federally listed T&E species to a Region-3 sensitive species, the amendment adds to the organizational clarity and usefulness of Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Eliminating the outdated Forest Plan (page 64) requirement for evaluating and managing prairie dog towns for their potential contribution to black-footed ferret recovery efforts would have no effect on black-footed ferrets or their habitat. Black-footed ferrets are endangered throughout their range in Colorado, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming (www.enature.com/fieldguide). They are extirpated in New Mexico and have not been found in New Mexico since 1934 (<http://nmnhp.unm.edu/bisonm>; NMDGF, 1991; Frey and Yates, 1996). It is highly unlikely that the Forest could ever support sustainable populations of black-footed ferrets due to a lack of sufficiently large prairies or grasslands to support the number of prairie dog colonies necessary as a ferret prey base. Large, high-density clusters of prairie dog colonies are necessary to support populations of black-footed ferrets (Forrest et al 1985). A prey base for just one female ferret and her litter requires a high-density prairie dog colony covering nearly 600 acres (<http://nmnhp.unm.edu/bisonm>). There are no black-footed ferret reintroduction sites on the Forest, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently revising their 1978 recovery plan for this species.

The amendment would make the Forest Plan consistent with scientific knowledge about black-footed ferrets and the prairie dog colonies needed to support their recovery. The amendment would not change the Forest Service's requirement to "evaluate activities which may disturb the integrity of prairie dog towns" even though the proposed amendment drops this language, because National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations and agency directives require the Forest Service to evaluate the effects of proposed management activities on all affected wildlife species and their habitat.

Monitoring Special Species Habitat

Combining the two very similar sentences on monitoring from Forest Plan pages 63 and 65, allows the Forest Plan to be more concise and easy to use. The amended language states "monitor management practices within occupied and potential threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitat, and evaluate impacts," which does not eliminate original words or intent, and therefore would have no effect.

When the Forest Plan is revised and the monitoring chapter (Forest Plan Chapter 5) is addressed, this monitoring requirement may be moved into Chapter 5. Chapter 5 (page 179) currently contains adequate monitoring requirements for these habitats, including requirements to monitor habitat trends for bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and selected species of state and federally listed T&E and sensitive plants and animals. That direction would not be altered by the proposed amendment.

Peregrine Falcon Habitat

The amended language in Table 1 (sections on Peregrine Falcon and Sensitive Species) clarifies and improves the management direction for peregrine falcon habitat while capturing the intent of the original standards and guidelines for this species, now listed as sensitive rather than threatened or endangered. The amendment does this by requiring the Forest Service to evaluate the impacts of proposed actions on sensitive species or their habitats according to detailed

procedures in FSM 2672.4. Amended language requires completing a Biological Evaluation and coordinating with state and federal agencies in identifying potential negative impacts to sensitive species and their habitats, and ways to avoid or mitigate those impacts where possible. In addition, amended language requires the FS to follow the specific requirements and restrictions on habitat-disturbing activities described in the peregrine falcon habitat site plans. The amendment states: “When a peregrine falcon site plan doesn’t already exist and a biological evaluation finds that a proposed action may negatively impact an occupied eyrie, a site plan must be developed for the eyrie before approving the project”².

Thus, the amendment does not relieve Forest Service personnel from avoiding activities likely to cause disturbance to nesting peregrine falcons during breeding season, and captures the intent of the original prescriptive direction from Forest Plan page 63. Forest Service personnel must develop and follow site-specific eyrie management plans that specify what activities are to be restricted or prohibited, including when and where to avoid potential adverse impacts to falcon habitat. The amended language goes beyond the specific examples originally listed on Forest Plan page 63 to cover a broader range of land use practices or activities.

The current requirement to evaluate activities within four miles of peregrine falcon nesting habitat is not eliminated by the proposed change. There is an approximate four-mile sensitive zone delineated around each designated suitable peregrine breeding habitat area, and the Biological Evaluation (for sensitive species) and environmental analysis under NEPA would continue to require evaluation of effects of proposed activities within that entire zone. Thus, there would be no change in the need to evaluate “activities proposed within four miles of potential or existing nesting habitat”.

The amendment would replace the current Forest Plan language that states “Activities likely to cause disturbance, including public use will be prohibited in the vicinity of essential peregrine falcon nesting habitat between March 1st and August 15th, unless a biological assessment and determination of “no effect” has been made.” This change was needed for consistency with current policies and directives and to reflect the de-listing of the species. Only federally listed species require completion of a biological assessment and determination of no effect, not likely to adversely affect, likely to adversely affect, etc. under Endangered Species Act regulations. Thus, the original Forest Plan direction no longer applies to peregrine falcon.

The amendment does not specifically prohibit activities “that may significantly alter the character of essential peregrine falcon habitat (generally within four miles of nest site)” as stated in the original direction from Forest Plan page 63. The Forest found over time that this direction was not feasible to implement while meeting other management goals and objectives, nor consistent with agency policies and other Region-3 Forest Plan direction for managing peregrine falcon habitat (contained in other Forest Plans). There are roads and highways necessary for public and agency access as well as recreation sites located within four miles of a nest site. It is critical for the agency to have discretion over whether or not to prohibit activities that may cause some visual or noise disturbance within four miles of a nest site. The amended language requires that activities that may disturb or threaten nesting peregrine falcons be evaluated and avoided or mitigated where possible, and restrictions on activities that may disturb falcons must be

² The word “eyrie” refers to “designated suitable nest site”, consistent with interpretations used in the Regional Forester’s letter and five-year monitoring direction (9/16/99, file code 2670).

developed and followed in accordance with the eyrie site plan. Activities that would negatively impact peregrine falcon nesting habitat would typically not be allowed to occur unless there is a compelling need to do otherwise. The amended language allows for agency discretion to make these decisions on a case-by-case basis, consistent with Forest Service policies and directives, and consistent with the way the Forest currently plans and implements projects in the vicinity of peregrine falcon nests. In evaluating sensitive species, Biological Evaluations must contain a determination about whether the project will impact individuals or habitat, contribute to a trend towards federal listing, or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

Other minor changes incorporated into the amendment for the peregrine falcon replace outdated terminology, reflect de-listing of the species, and eliminate redundant standards found in different parts of the Forest Plan or in specific eyrie site plans. These changes improve Forest Plan consistency with current agency policies and practices, and make the Forest Plan easier to use when planning and implementing projects.

Sensitive Species

The amendment appropriately takes the original direction specific to grama grass cactus and wood lily from Forest Plan page 63, and applies it instead to all Region-3 sensitive species. Grama grass cactus and wood lily are no longer listed as sensitive, thus the original direction regarding “methods to protect and enhance grama grass cactus and wood lily habitat with the goal of eliminating the need for formal listing as threatened or endangered...” was modified to apply to sensitive species, consistent with the original intent of the Forest Plan direction as well as agency policy and directives. The amended wording is stronger than the original wording as it replaces “consider methods” with “utilize methods” and broadens the standard to cover a wider range of species. Similar changes were made to the other two standards and guidelines specific to grama grass cactus, due to the change in status of this species, for example, it is no longer necessary to develop a recovery action plan for this species.

The amendment appropriately drops the outdated requirement for the Forest to “jointly review of the status and action needs for the spotted bat and meadow jumping mouse” because joint status reviews for sensitive species are now conducted by the Regional office rather than at the Forest level. In addition, the amendment offers the same or more protection as the original direction by requiring “coordination with state and federal agencies in identifying potential adverse effects to sensitive species and their habitats, and other state-listed species”.

While the amendment eliminates a few standards and guidelines for those specific species that are no longer listed as sensitive, it adds a new requirement to address those species by stating: “emphasize conservation of plant or animal species having limited distribution and abundance on the Forest, such as grama grass cactus in grasslands and woodlands and wood lily in mid-elevation mixed conifer forests. This would promote extra consideration and application of habitat conservation measures as needed when agency personnel are planning and implementing projects in habitats for these and other species of limited abundance and distribution on the Forests that are no longer listed as sensitive.

The amendment’s requirements for addressing all sensitive species eliminates the need to continuously amend the Forest Plan each time a species is added to or removed from the Region-3 sensitive species list. The spotted bat is no longer listed as sensitive while the meadow jumping mouse remains on the sensitive species list. The amended language provides the same level of

protection to all sensitive species as was intended in the standards and guidelines for these individual species. It further requires the Forest to “utilize methods designed to protect and enhance sensitive species populations with the goal of eliminating the need for formal listing with US Fish and Wildlife Service”, to “evaluate the impacts of proposed actions on sensitive species or their habitats according to the procedures described in FSM 2672.4... and avoid or mitigate negative impacts where possible”. Thus, there would be no actual change in the level of protection provided in evaluating and managing sensitive species or their habitats.

Jemez Mountains Salamander Habitat

The original standards and guidelines that were eliminated in the amendment are those where the required tasks have already been accomplished for Jemez Mountains salamander. The Forest Service worked cooperatively with the NM Department of Game and Fish and other agencies to develop the Cooperative Management Plan (as a “master interagency agreement” and “action plan”) for the Jemez Mountains Salamander (Jan. 2000), and completed the inventory and evaluation needed to develop that plan. In accordance with that interagency agreement (page 3), the amendment incorporates the comprehensive management requirements for the salamander, including requirements for further inventory and evaluation of salamander habitat.

The amendment expands on the original direction by additionally requiring the Forest Service to adhere to all applicable interagency management plans or conservations agreements, including those for Arizona willow, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and any other interagency conservation plans developed in the future. Incorporation of these conservation plans includes many detailed and specific requirements for monitoring and evaluating impacts to these species, consulting with the appropriate interagency team, and avoiding or mitigating potential negative impacts where possible. The salamander management plan also addresses permitted firewood collection in occupied salamander habitat, and therefore replaces the original standard and guideline on this subject that pre-dated the plan.

Effects of Alternative B - No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the purpose and need would not be met. The Forest Plan direction would not reflect current special status species lists or agency policies. Without updated and clarified direction and terminology, the Forest Plan would remain inconsistent with current policies and practices, which could make it more difficult to use when planning and implementing projects. It would not be consistent with requirements that apply to managing all T&E or sensitive species. Thus, management direction that actually applies to all T&E or sensitive species would seem to only apply to a few species. This situation could cause inconsistencies in how standards and guidelines are interpreted and implemented. The Forest Plan would contain requirements for tasks that have already been completed. It would continue to become more and more outdated, showing discrepancies every time a species is added to or taken off the federal or regional species lists. It would not meet the requirement for incorporating the Jemez Mountains Salamander Cooperative Management Plan into the Forest Plan, thus violating the interagency agreement. The Forest Plan would also lack the incorporation of other interagency agreements/plans for evaluating, managing and monitoring sensitive species such as Arizona willow and Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

The Forest Plan would remain poorly organized, with standards and guidelines for managing special status species scattered in several different sections. Without updating the Forest Plan to be consistent with other relevant agency direction, there would not be a common understanding among agency personnel, other agencies and the public about the status of each species and how each type of habitat is to be evaluated and managed. The Forest Plan would continue to emphasize certain actions and species that are no longer those of highest concern. Overall, it would be more difficult to efficiently and effectively use the outdated direction in the Forest Plan when planning and implementing projects that may affect special status species.

Chapter 4 – Agencies & Persons Consulted

Potentially Interested or Affected Parties

During the preparation of this EA, 145 potentially interested groups were contacted about the proposed amendment, including: federal, state, city and county agencies; tribes and pueblos; educational, environmental, recreational, and industry organizations; homeowner and rural community associations; and public libraries. In addition, approximately 17 individual citizens received a scoping letter or were otherwise contacted about this project. Mailing lists for all correspondence are contained in the project file.

EA Preparation Team

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